

MAINE RURAL AMERICORPS GRANT REVIEW (12/2018)

Task Force Final Recommendation:	Fund with requirement corrections and clarifications be made.
---	---

RFP Due Date: 11/30/2018

Application Number : 19AC209529

Legal Applicant: Maine Youth Alliance

Grant Type: ☒ Cost reimbursement
☐ Fixed Amount
☐ Education Award Only

Project Name: I Know ME Americorps Formula Mentoring Program

Project Contact: Patricia Estabrook

MSYs and Slots requested: 2 MSY; 2 slots @ 1700 hours

Budget Proposed
 CNCS funds \$29,142
 Local Match \$32,402
 Cost per Members \$14,571

Other than the legal applicant, please list the agencies or organizations that appear to be the major collaborators or partners in this grant.

RSU3, The Game Loft, The Lerner Foundation, Recent Graduates of RSU3, Parents of RSU3 Students, RSU3 Administrators and teachers

Applicant proposes to deliver services: (select what the applicant states in their application that their program will cover:

- ☐ Within a single municipality
☐ County-wide in a single County
☐ Statewide
☐ Within a single County but not covering the entire County
☒ Multiple Counties but not Statewide

Which CNCS focus area does this applicant identify as related to its proposal? Do the applicant's activities in each focus area fall under the type of activities CNCS says are acceptable (see RFP page 82-9)? Do the performance measures chosen match the focus area?

Focus Area Identified	Activities are within list of acceptable for funding
<input type="checkbox"/> Disaster Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Stewardship	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Futures	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic Opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Veterans and Military Families	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Performance Measures	
Do the Service Activity performance measures chosen match the focus area?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do the Capacity Building performance measures match one of the sets listed in the RFP?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No*
Do the Member Development performance measures exactly match the set provided in the RFP?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

*After the Maine RFP was released, CNCS edited the grant application database and removed the performance measures Maine uses. They can be entered as user-defined measures and MCCS staff will coach successful applicants on how to do this.

Executive Summary

Maine Youth Alliance dba The Game Loft proposes to have two (2) AmeriCorps members who will provide mentoring to students age 12-15 and recruit and manage volunteers in the Regional School Unit (RSU) #3 in Waldo County, Maine. At
 APPLICANT: Maine Youth Alliance

the end of the first program year the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for preparing at risk students for success in the classroom and beyond. In addition, the AmeriCorps volunteers will leverage an additional five volunteers who will be engaged in mentoring relationships with the students. The program will concentrate on the CNCS focus areas of Education and Member Development and Capacity Building. The CNCS investment of \$27,686.00 will be matched with \$33062.00, \$1880.00 local, state and federal funds in public funding and \$25,059.00 in private funding.

AmeriCorps members will address the need of poor academic involvement and low aspirations exhibited by students in Regional School Unit #3 (Unity, Brooks, Monroe, Jackson, Freedom, Knox, Liberty, Montville, Thorndike, Troy, Waldo) which has a significantly high number of youth who live in poverty and a significant population of students who have had Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). Mount View Middle School estimates that thirty percent (30%) of students have significant Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) which are defined as two or more of the following: low household income, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, mental illness of a household member, problematic drinking of a household member, illegal street or prescription use by a household member, divorce or separation of a parent, domestic violence toward a parent, incarceration of a household member. Research on the impact shows students with two or more ACES have lower resilience and lower rates of school success (SAMHSA). Students from low income households with a high number of Adverse Childhood Experiences have less engagement in school than their peers.

Performance measures (targets proposed for Year 1; targets for years 2 and 3 set in continuations):

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: ED1A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 10

OUTCOME: ED7A: Number of students with decreased disciplinary incidents

Proposed target: 7

OUTCOME: ED27C: Number of students with improved academic engagement or social-emotional skills

Proposed target: 10

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

OUTPUT: Number of AmeriCorps program training and other formal development activities that result in increased AmeriCorps member skills, knowledge, and abilities related to the service assignment

Proposed target: 24 hours

OUTCOME: Number of AmeriCorps members demonstrating increased competency in skills or application of knowledge.

Proposed target: 2

CAPACITY BUILDING

OUTPUT: G3-3.4: Number of organizations that received capacity building services

Proposed target: 5

OUTCOME: G3-3.10A Number of organizations that increase their efficiency, effectiveness, and/or program reach

Proposed target: 5

Scoring Detail:

Peer Reviewer Consensus Score. *Assessment of narrative using point distribution from federal agency. Major categories (Program Design, Organizational Capability, Budget and Cost) are dictated by CFR rubric for scoring. The break downs within categories are from federal agency and change annually.*

CATEGORY	Qualitative Rating	Points
Rationale & Approach/Program Design Section (50%)		
Need (5)	Strong	5
Intervention (8)	Strong	8
Theory of Change, Evidence, and Logic Model (8)	Strong	8
Work Plan Year 1 (8)	Adequate	5.36
Notice Priority (1)	Strong	1
Member training (6)	Strong	6
Member supervision (5)	Strong	5
Member Experience (5)	Strong	5
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identity (3)	Adequate	2.01
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing (10)	Strong	10
Compliance and Accountability (15)	Strong	15
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (25)	Strong	25
TOTAL		95.37
90-100, Strongly Recommend for Further Review		

Task Force Consensus Score. *The Task Force reviewers assess the additional technical criteria that states are directed to consider by the CFR.*

	Score
Program Model	15
Past Performance	4.95
Financial Plan	6.7
Fiscal Systems	3.3
Total Task Force Score	29.95
Peer Review Score	95.37
Final Score for Applicant	125.32 of 150 potential

Final Assessment of Application:

- ☐ Fund Application with no corrections/modifications
☒ Fund with corrections/modifications
☐ Do Not Fund

Referenced Conditions/Corrections

- Correct capacity building performance measures
- Correct budget formula errors and inconsistencies
- Correct member terms of service and member costs. Proposal states members would start in June but there are not enough days remaining in the year for members to complete the proposed term of service.
- Develop and add to proposal the program logic model. (Applicants were directed to not submit this and plan for working with MCCA staff to develop/enter it if selected for award.)

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Section: Program Design (50 %)

Note: CNCS has subdivided this part of the narrative into 5 parts. The comments indicate the part and follow the narrative outline in the RFP.

Need

- Mount View is in Waldo County which is a target area. Meets criteria of rural - clear description of need, developed by school and Lerner Foundation
- Brief, some local anecdotes and rationale
- The applicant showed evidence from the school district and the county to support the prevalence of the community need. Community members from the school district, including former students and parents, partners, staff from the Game Loft, as well as the board of directors were engaged. There will be 20 community members involved in the program's implementation.

Intervention

- Plan for students to Know Maine - utilizing Community mentors 2x a week for 2 hours for ACES individuals. Using proven techniques and successful programs
- Detailed duration, intensity and target population provided.
- All criteria for intervention were met. In addition, the core activities of the intervention were thoroughly explained and engage community members beyond the initial proposal time frame.

Theory of change (narrative text) and logic model

- Toward strong end of programs followed in logic model utilizing PEAR Assessment and HSA assessment tools 2x per year to track accomplishments and success.
- Significant statistics as well as local narratives for the effectiveness, with detailed proposed outcomes and quantified goals
- The applicant showed a progressive approach to change over three years. Community involvement is strong throughout the program cycle.

Evidence

- Good Plan- Good way to measure progress and thus effectiveness.
- Several sources on the importance of mentoring
- The applicant presented well researched evidence. Five sources were used to provide support for the program.

Work Plan for Year One

- Good Plan- be on the Job by June 2019 with goal of 75% of Mentees attending regular meetings and with 4 hours a week of 1 on 1 meetings.
- The work plan addressed all of the assessment criteria.

Notice Priority

- Meet Americorp focus on Education in Mentoring Youth Criteria. Set focus for building sustainability
- All aspects addressed

- Priority meets the funding priority of Education. The proposed program meets all 12 of the regulatory requirements.

Member Training

- Supervised daily for first 3 months, Then weekly there after. Good to be in same room as a supervisor so questions can be asked and members can be immersed in the opportunity
- Specific and extensive training listed
- Members will be thoroughly trained in their position through a intensive, continual process. Members will be given materials to read and then discuss with their supervisor, and will observe their supervisor in the role of mentee before working directly with students. Members will also receive all CNCS required training, and will attend the Blaine House Conference on Volunteerism.

Member Experience

- Opportunities in learning about leading youth, volunteer recruitment and volunteer supervision. learning to manage groups. make presentations. Members will be required to participate in other actives in the community
- Thoughtful consideration on skills gained, and areas of collaboration
- Members will gain experience and knowledge working with youth and managing volunteers. These skills will transfer to educational and social services settings. Members will reflect regularly on their service, as well as be encouraged to engage with their cohorts across the state. They will also participate in the MLK Day of Service and the UW Day of Caring.

Member Supervision

- Several responsible parties. but one designayted in same office as members(Mr. Colby) - so meets daily and provides guidance
- Members will meet daily with their supervisor for the first three months, and weekly thereafter.

Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

- Patches on clothes will identify members as well as business card supplied by grantee, Display in public and will be publicize as I Know Me Americorp Formula Program
- Wearing the A, training on the history and goals of AmeriCorps.
- Members will be trained on their roles and responsibilities as AmeriCorps members, and will present this information to the Game Loft staff. They will have business cards with the logo, will wear AmeriCorps gear at all times while performing service, and will connect with other members from across the state. They will attend local social events while wearing their gear in order to promote AmeriCorps within the communities they serve.

Section: Organizational Capability (25 %)

Organizational Background and Staffing

- Service for 260+ youths in Waldo county. Game Loft has run youth programs since 1998. This particular program (IKME) has run sine 2018
- Experienced organization having hosted several AmeriCorps Grants with professionally seasoned staff, and thoughtful consideration of the strengths and opportunities
- The Game Loft has bee in operation for 20 years, and has a strong staff and volunteer core. Students served has remained steady over the past few years, and volunteer numbers have increased in the same amount of time. The organization is fully aware of their strengths and challenges. The board is engaged in plans to develop service delivery and development.

Compliance and Accountability

- System has written procedures in place to detect misuse of funding and fraud, It is monitored by the school and the Lerner Foundation
- Several independent avenues of oversight and capacity to manage program funds

- The Game Loft has policies and procedures in place to ensure accountability and protection of private and public funds. Oversight is excellent and varied and utilizes the Treasurer, Board Executive Committee, and Board Finance Committee. Steps have been taken to ensure segregation of duties.

Section: Cost and Budget Adequacy (25 %)

- Budget meet \$/MSY and is also good has additional funding from school and Lerner Foundation and aligns with project narrative
- Cost shares and detailed budget
- The average cost of MY meets the criteria for the program. Funds are adequate and available for the program to operate. The organization operates at an increase in net assets.

SUMMARY APPRAISAL 1. Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant? Yes (2); No (1)

Comments:

- All elements are in place for a successful venture. Additional funding is adequate and opportunity to make a difference in Waldo county is a huge opportunity
- Prior experience hosting AmeriCorps grants and detailed proposal.
- The proposal contains appropriate citations and shows that the activity was well researched. Community, agency, and partner support is strong. The program has been running since 2017 and has support from the school district. This proposal will assist the program in expanding and will assist the agency to gain stronger volunteer management operations.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

None

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

Ought to pass

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Model. This section's criteria relate to alignment of proposal with funding priorities in RFP, significance of program in the context of statewide issues, the applicant's readiness to take on a significant cadre of volunteers (AmeriCorps members) and it's demonstrated ability to engage volunteers, and the match between the program traits and Commission funding goals.

- 1. Program is well aligned with the education funding priority. The need is clearly addressed, although somewhat dependent on anecdotal evidence. Could have been strengthened by greater reliance on local data. Area clearly meets the rural definition and is strengthened by reference to MSAD 3's large geographic territory. While MSAD 3 has a graduation rate at the state average (87%), the application notes that post secondary education is becoming more necessary due to the changing nature of the jobs available in Waldo County. This contention could have been strengthened with some actual data on the changing nature of employment opportunities and post high school educational achievement in younger, recent high school graduates. Improving educational levels in Maine's more challenged urban and rural areas may be a key to the future success of those areas. In addition, Maine likely has a high percentage of school aged children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (which the application posits on anecdotal information is the situation in its area). Programs that are successful in addressing the needs of this group and improving educational and economic outcomes are important in that context.
- 2. As described, is the program model focused more strongly on external impact (outcomes in the community) or internal impact (outcomes in the organizations working in the community)? Is the focus appropriate for the ultimate goals of this funding and the need?

The strongest outcomes are focused on the school aged program participants, There is an internal component, improved volunteer management, but it is of significantly less import to the overall application.

- 3. Does the proposed scale or scope of the program meet the funding or resource allocation goals of the Commission (geographic, population sector, etc.) that were stated in the RFP?
Yes.
- 4. Is the program model one that is permitted under AmeriCorps? (youth corps, team, dispersed site, etc.)
Yes.
- 5. Are there local circumstances that are shared by other communities or regions and, therefore, program development/success has broader implications or usefulness in Maine?
Yes. See comment above.
- 6. Is there evidence the applicant understands volunteer management and has an organizational commitment to supporting service by volunteers? Does the readiness survey section on volunteer management indicate the organization is prepared to engage volunteers? If the organization is just starting to implement volunteer management, are there other indicators in the readiness assessment that point to likely support for volunteer engagement?

MYA has considerable experience in utilizing volunteers in its various programs. While recognizing some organizational shortcomings (lack of a volunteer coordinator position), it employs a variety of good management practices and is looking for the AC members to further improve this. In addition, the program model appear to be well thought out given the I Know Me program is already in existence and supported by the Lerner Foundation, which has obviously worked with MYA toward implementing a model they are familiar with and which has supporting evaluations as to effectiveness. While their application makes a number of unsupported or anecdotal claims, it also references supportive research. The members will be brought on board to expand the size of the program, not implement a totally new one. This adds comfort to supporting the application. The size of the program expansion also seems reasonable and should be easily accomplished.

- *Summary comment:* The program seems like it addresses the needs both for the rural area of Maine and needs that the Commission is trying to address. It will have an impact directly on the community and a wide geographic range. They partner with a local school district that has a wide reach around the community and can help support and raise awareness about the program. Though I am not convinced that the organization has the understanding to adequately manage volunteers. They will have staff that will be working at the same time as the Americorp Volunteers, but I am not confident that they realize the amount of time needed to meet the Americorp Service Hours as was brought up in the Staff review of the program.

Past Performance

- In addition, the program model appear to be well thought out given the I Know Me program is already in existence and supported by the Lerner Foundation, which has obviously worked with MYA toward implementing a model they are familiar with and which has supporting evaluations as to effectiveness. While their application makes a number of unsupported or anecdotal claims, it also references supportive research. The members will be brought on board to expand the size of the program, not implement a totally new one. This adds comfort to supporting the application. The size of the program expansion also seems reasonable and should be easily accomplished.
- No information was available to demonstrate that they have sufficient grant experience to provide an accurate assessment. They have never been awarded a Americorp Grant in the past. Other grants were not adequately spoken of to make a determination in this category.

Financial Plan

- As is almost always the case, the budget must be corrected to reflect errors and missed requirements. However, these errors are not beyond the range of expectations. One concern is that the first year time frame must be adjusted to allow for the requested hours to be met. There is a strong local match given the involvement of the Lerner Foundation.
- Due to the number of discrepancies found by Commission Staff I am not confident that their financial plan for their program could be successful. It appears that there have been multiple areas where expenses have been underestimated. This practice may be a partial explanation as to why the organization continues to operate at a deficit and their liabilities continue to outpace their assets.

Fiscal Systems

- Normally I would be quite concerned with funding an organization that has liabilities in excess of assets and that has operated at a loss for a number of years. However, the liability is largely related to deferred rents from the co-directors, the agency has been around for a number of years, and it indicates (without, however, independent verification) that it has operated at a net

positive for the last several years. In addition, a number of other organizations appear to be monitoring this agency including the Lerner Foundation and United Way of Eastern Maine. They have also handled some federal funds in the past.

- Reviewing the 990's (2016 and 2017) along with the ratios provided by the staff assessment, I am not confident that the fiscal system or capacity of the organization could handle the necessary administration and management of federal funding as required by regulations.

SUMMARY APPRAISAL

1. *Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant?*

1 Yes, 1 No

- Applicant is seeking to expand an existing program started with grant funding. As such, the agency has much of what is needed already in place. It clearly meets a documented community need and the agency has experience in using volunteers. Expanding an existing program lends comfort to supporting this application.
- I think the program has the potential to be effective, I do not feel that the financial capabilities and plan of the organization MYA dba The Game Loft is capable of administering the federal funding of the program. Perhaps if the Regional School Unit would help administer those funds, I would feel more comfortable.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- As always, the budget needs to be cleaned up. First year hours need to be corrected. Of the 4 applications, this one was the most complete in providing needed information.
- The elements of the Financial Plan, the Fiscal Systems in place, and their past experience with Americorp Grants and volunteer management.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- See all my comments above.
- It has potential and it definitely is trying to address a high priority issue in rural Maine through an effective partnership with a regional school unit. They need the infrastructure and systems in place to be able to administer this program and I do not believe that it is in place at this time.